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INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
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RUEKJCS/JCS WASHDC PRIORITY  
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAMA 001844

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PARM](#) [BA](#) [IR](#) [REGION](#) [BILAT](#) [OFFICIALS](#)  
SUBJECT: DEPUTY PM TELLS GSD DELEGATION THE BEST DEFENSE IS  
BEING PREPARED

REF: STATE 171822

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Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)  
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Summary  
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¶1. (S) Deputy Prime Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak told the visiting interagency Gulf Security Dialogue (GSD) delegation October 18 that Iran is a diplomatic, military, and political threat to the countries of the region and that the best defense is to show you are prepared for possible future scenarios. He commented that while some GCC states were slow to commit to initiatives like the GSD, Bahrain does not hesitate to make an evaluation of its interests and then sticks with its decision. Iran claims that its nuclear program is for power only but refuses to allow the IAEA to inspect its facilities. The IAEA, Shaikh Mohammed said, should be the judge of Iran's program. On Iraq, he stated that there can be a political deal on federalism, but the country must maintain its territorial integrity. He praised Secretary Rice's engagement on Israeli-Palestinian affairs

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and said that President Abbas deserves the support of the international community. He worried that Iran was meddling in Bahrain's internal affairs by influencing how some groups vote in upcoming parliamentary and municipal elections. End Summary.

¶2. (S) The interagency Gulf Security Dialogue delegation led by Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs John Hillen and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Peter Rodman met with Deputy Prime Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa October 18 to discuss achieving progress on the six pillars of the Dialogue (reftel). The delegation also met with King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, Crown Prince Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Assistant Under Secretary for Coordination and Follow Up Shaikh Abdul Aziz

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bin Mubarak Al Khalifa (septels).

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Prudent to Prepare for Future Scenarios  
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13. (S) Shaikh Mohammed opened the meeting by welcoming the delegation to Bahrain and acknowledging that regional defense and security are among the most important issues to discuss at this time. A/S Hillen said that the premise of the GSD is to accelerate, broaden, and deepen the security relationship between the United States and its friends in the Gulf. The U.S. is currently working with each country bilaterally with the intention to move multilaterally as soon as it is feasible. We want to show Iran that the U.S. stands by its friends. Shaikh Mohammed agreed that Iran was a diplomatic, military, and political threat to the countries of the region. It is prudent to prepare now for any possible future scenario so there are no surprises. "The best defense is to show people you are prepared," he said.

14. (S) A/S Rodman requested Shaikh Mohammed's advice on gaining the support of all the GCC countries for the GSD initiative, indicating that Qatar and Oman were not as supportive as other countries. Shaikh Mohammed replied that some neighbors were hesitant to go first and waited for other countries to take the lead. Bahrain was not like this, however; it decides whether an initiative is in its interests, then sticks with the decision. The UAE has direct contact with Iran on a daily basis and is constantly reminded of the threat. With its extensive gas resources, Qatar should try to protect itself from Iran. Oman is concerned about Iran's influence on the Strait of Hormuz, but the GSD is a defensive arrangement and can provide great benefits. Kuwait worries about the Bushehr nuclear facility, which is just across the Gulf. If anything happens at Bushehr, Kuwait and all other countries on the Gulf could face contamination and pollution. Proper defensive arrangements send the right message and "protect us all."

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IAEA Should be Judge of Iran's Nuclear Program  
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15. (S) Shaikh Mohammed said that Iran's military build-up was worrying. Iranian officials occasionally visit Bahrain

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and want to promote bilateral cooperation. Former Foreign Minister Velayati had proposed joint military maneuvers, but Shaikh Mohammed had refused, telling him, "you only conduct military exercises with countries you trust." He asked how long Iranian citizens will put up with a government that spends money to rebuild in south Lebanon while Iranian villages damaged by earthquakes are not being repaired. On the nuclear program, Iran claims it is not pursuing weapons. If this is true, Shaikh Mohammed asked, why does Iran not allow the IAEA to inspect its facilities. Every country has the right to develop peaceful nuclear power, but not nuclear weapons. Iran should allow the IAEA to be the judge of its nuclear program.

16. (S) In response to A/S Hillen's question, Shaikh Mohammed said Bahrain knows former President Khatemi very well, calling him a moderate. But the system is focused on a single leader, Khamenei. Even Rafsanjani could not win the last presidential election because Khamenei had decided on Ahmadi-Nejad. "Khamenei is another Shah," Shaikh Mohammed commented. Ahmadi-Nejad, in contrast with Khatemi, believes the system is too liberal. Shaikh Mohammed expressed his hope that Iran will learn from its past and make positive changes for the future. But in the meantime, people try to flee Iran every night for a better life in the UAE.

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Maintain Territorial Integrity of Iraq  
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17. (S) Turning to Iraq, Shaikh Mohammed said the main goal has to be to bring the people some measure of security. Politically, there can be a deal on federalism, but the country must maintain its territorial integrity. Bahrain has

assisted Iraq in several ways already and would like to do more. Bahrain's former ambassador in Baghdad had been shot in July 2005; the GOB will send another ambassador as soon as the security situation improves. A/S Hillen said the U.S. was focused on helping the Iraqi government succeed in spite of Sunni-Shia tensions. The Iraqi government should be strong enough to withstand pressure from Iran but not strong enough to threaten its neighbors.

¶8. (S) On the other agenda items in the GSD read-ahead paper, Shaikh Mohammed said that Bahrain supports intelligence cooperation and information exchange with the U.S. This is most important in fighting terrorism, from the security, political, and financial perspectives. He noted that Bahrain had recently passed a counter-terrorism and anti-money laundering/combating the financing of terror law to address these issues directly. After receiving an explanation from A/S Hillen on protecting critical infrastructure, Shaikh Mohammed agreed that the U.S. and Bahrain should work together to mitigate risk.

¶9. (S) Shaikh Mohammed stated that any discussion of security in the region must include the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Bahrain believes Palestinian President Abbas is a good leader who deserves support. The extremists want to reach the hearts and minds of people. To counteract this, the U.S. and the rest of the international community should reengage on peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. He cited Secretary Rice's recent trip to Cairo and Ramallah as important steps.

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Iran Meddling in Bahraini Affairs  
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¶10. (S) Shaikh Mohammed noted that with Bahraini parliamentary and municipal elections coming, Iran was exerting its influence with certain groups in a sectarian way. "We don't want our democracy experiment to fail," he said, and worried that Iran may be directing some Bahraini citizens about who to vote for. Democracy has rules, and people must follow the rules, especially not the use of violence to achieve political objectives. Many well-educated people are hesitant to get into politics, leaving fundamentalists, both Sunni and Shia, competing for seats in parliament and municipal councils. In Bahrain, he said, we want prosperity and progress, but the influence from outside countries could result in sectarian tensions like in Iraq.

¶11. (S) In conclusion, Shaikh Mohammed said that Bahrain wants to continue to engage with the U.S. on the Gulf Security Dialogue. "Friends should talk to each other, and

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be seen talking to each other." The goal is to move from the stage of ideas to on-the-ground improvements. Referring to the upcoming IISS Gulf Dialogue conference to be held in Bahrain in December, Shaikh Mohammed suggested using that forum to involve other countries in discussions related to the GSD. He welcomed the planned participation of Secretary Rumsfeld in the conference.

¶12. (U) A/S Hillen and A/S Rodman cleared this cable.

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